

# **Early Data on Adolescent Overweight in Kansas and Current Efforts to Combat this Growing Epidemic**

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, chronic disease in the U.S. accounts for 70 percent of all deaths. Poor diet and physical activity account for 400,000 U.S. deaths each year, second only to tobacco use as an actual cause of death.

The prevalence of obesity in the U.S. has climbed substantially during the past 20 years. In particular, childhood overweight has become a significant problem within our country. The growing burden of overweight and obesity, among both adults and children, has received much attention in the popular media as well as in medical literature. Efforts to combat this issue are difficult, and are compounded further when the level of the problem is unknown.

While the prevalence of obesity and overweight among Kansas' adults is well documented, through 12 years of continual data from the Kansas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), numbers associated with overweight in children and adolescents in Kansas have not been available. In 2004, KDHE and the Office of Health Promotion (OHP) received a grant from the Sunflower Foundation, *Health Care for Kansans*, to help close the gap between adult and adolescent overweight data. These funds were instrumental in establishing the Kansas Child Health Assessment and Monitoring Project (K-CHAMP), an OHP program working to determine the prevalence of overweight among Kansas' adolescents and children and other associated factors.

## **Kansas Adolescent Overweight: A First Look**

Efforts to study the issue of childhood overweight were fueled by early findings from data collected as part of the 2002-2003 Kansas Youth Tobacco Survey (YTS). Questions added to the YTS on self-reported height and weight showed 11 percent of Kansas' adolescents in grades six through 12 were overweight and 13.6 percent were at risk for overweight. These figures are comparable to the national estimates of overweight and at risk for overweight among adolescents in grades 9-12 reported to be 10.5 percent and 13.6 percent respectively. The prevalence of overweight among boys in the state was 15 percent compared to seven percent among girls. Although not included in these early overweight figures, the prevalence of overweight among children in kindergarten through grade 5 will be determined through data collected in the spring of 2005 as part of K-CHAMP.

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### **Current Efforts**

In addition to the programs within the Office of Health Promotion and the Bureau for Children, Youth, and Families, K-CHAMP has coordinated efforts with the Kansas State Department of Education and the Coordinated School Health Program. As a result of this partnership, the K-CHAMP school survey, the Youth Tobacco Survey and the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System have worked to reduce the survey burden on Kansas schools while preserving the collection of vital adolescent health data.

Also, K-CHAMP has partnered with the University of Kansas Medical Center and Research Instructor Nikki Nollen to incorporate an environmental assessment in 34 of the high schools participating in K-CHAMP. Dr. Nollen is a Pfizer Scholar and her school environmental work is supported in part by the Pfizer Faculty Scholar Award in Public Health. Her work will explore the relationship between school environmental factors and overweight. These state and local partnerships will remain crucial to the success of K-CHAMP and the efforts of all in Kansas to reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity.